Pick-Me-Up

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Pick-Me-Up

by StratsWrote

Summary

The stranger was tall, handsome in a 'loveable tramp' kind of way. He looked rough around the edges. Aiden knew the look of a man accustomed to getting his way with his fists; he recognized the tell-tale signs.

"No," Aiden said, ducking his head back down to his paper.

“Come here often?”

Aiden looked up from his sketchbook, shielding his eyes from the bright sun. He’d set up by the Arch of Triumph, hoping to find some inspiration in the architecture. He didn’t draw structures very often, and he could use the practice.

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“No,” Aiden said, ducking his head back down to his paper.

The man sat beside him, close enough for Aiden to smell his cologne. “Where do you like to go, then?”

“Not ‘no’ as in ‘no I don’t come here often,’ ‘no’ as in ‘no, we aren’t doing this.’ Go flirt with someone else.”

The man leaned forward, inserting himself into Aiden’s peripheral vision. Despite himself, Aiden snuck another peek; he looked *charmed*.

“Isn’t anyone here half as pretty,” the man said.

“Your pickup lines are atrocious,” Aiden told him, though a pleased flutter had gone through him anyway. It was ridiculous a completely over-used line that the man probably used on any half-decent person that walked by.

But it was nice to be appreciated, sometimes.

“Ahhh, you can’t blame me for that,” the man said. “One look at you and every intelligent thought left my head.”

Aiden tapped his chin with the end of his pencil. “Were there many there to begin with?” he mused.

The man clutched his chest, affecting a shocked gasp. “You wound me, gorgeous.”

“Aiden.” *Fuck.* He’d broken the first rule of his travels: don’t engage, *never* engage, and certainly never spill identifying information.

“Aiden,” the man said, rolling Aiden’s name around in his mouth like it was a sweet to be savored. “Nigel,” he said, offering his hand. Aiden eyed it mistrustfully. “I don’t bite. In public, anyway.”

“Is that a promise?” Aiden shook Nigel’s hand, pulling back as quickly as was polite. He was being ridiculous. He was being *reckless*. And for what? A handsome face and a pair of nice arms? *Very* nice arms.

Nigel grinned. “I can make it one.”

“You move fast.”

“I don’t like to miss my opportunity.”

“You already have.” Aiden looked back to his sketch. The inspiration was still there, but the motivation had fled. It had been far too long since he’d had a conversation with another human being, besides ‘coffee, please.’

“That just means I have to try harder.”

Back home, this sort of determination would have been irritating. Offensive, even. No meant no, and that was all there was to it.

But Aiden was craving contact. Maybe Nigel could sense that. Maybe Nigel felt the same thing Aiden did; a burning need to connect with *someone*.

“Why?” Aiden asked. “Give me a better reason than my stunning beauty.”

Nigel tilted his head. A frown crossed his features, a furrow appearing between his eyes. “Because you looked so lonely,” he finally said.

The pencil snapped in Aiden’s hand. A moment, a heartbeat, a sudden surge of unwelcome emotion that he couldn’t tamp back.

He was, he was so very goddamn *lonely*.

Nigel reached out, his hand hesitating over Aiden’s. After a moment, he gently placed his hand over Aiden’s clenched fist, squeezing once. “Just a coffee,” he suggested. “My treat, gorgeous, and then you can flee into the night with my broken heart in your hands.”

Aiden laughed, choked and uncertain. “*Just* a coffee?”

“Well, we’ll see how much you like me when it’s gone.”

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